



World Disaster Reduction Day

“Water – Too much, too little: The leading cause of natural disasters”

On October 8, 1997, national and international agencies involved in disaster preparedness and mitigation are conducting a grassroots effort to educate the public about ways to reduce the risks and impacts of natural disasters – particularly those that involve too much or too little water. The effort is part of the celebration of World Disaster Reduction Day, a United Nations campaign linked to the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction. The purpose of the annual campaign is to raise global awareness that natural risks can be managed, and that the best time to take action is before disaster strikes.

In the United States, an ad hoc committee of federal and voluntary agencies with responsibilities for disaster mitigation, relief and education are spearheading the public education effort. The committee includes: the Federal Emergency Management Agency, American Red Cross, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the U.S. Geological Survey, the Department of Energy, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Small Business Administration, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, the Department of Transportation, the Department of Education, the Corporation for National Service and the National Interagency Fire Center.

This year’s theme is natural disasters that result from too much or too little water. The U.S. education effort is particularly focused on flooding, droughts, hurricanes, landslides, mudflows, severe storms, wildfires and tsunamis.

The agencies of the ad hoc committee are working with communities, schools, emergency managers and mass media at the local, regional and national level to promote disaster awareness messages. The agencies have also developed extensive packets of information that address mitigation, preparedness and disaster statistics, as well as indicating places where additional material can be obtained. The best source of information on these efforts or for World Disaster Reduction Day materials is the FEMA web site at www.fema.gov or through the web site of any of the ad hoc committee members.

In addition, the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction, the arm of the U.N. responsible for World Disaster Reduction Day, is holding a series of Internet conferences. The conference will focus on floods and drought and will feature reports that outline the impact of water-related disasters around the world. Further, the conference aims to build a culture of prevention by focusing on successful mitigation efforts. The Internet conference will take place from mid-September to mid-October. Interested participants can visit the conference web site at www.quipu.net, or can send an e-mail to: idndr@dha.unicc.org.